

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 EUR-12 CIAE-00 INR-07
NSAE-00 PM-05 DODE-00 /052 W
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R 261801Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY BAMA KO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7023

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BAMA KO 3057

FOR AF/W

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3
TAGS: PDIP, MASS, USSR, ML, US
SUBJ: SOVIET ACTIVITY IN MALI

REF: STATE 170070

1. NOT HAVING RECEIVED THE RELEVANT BACKGROUND PAPERS MENTIONED IN REFTEL, I FEEL SOMEWHAT HAMPERED IN RESPONDING. IN ANY EVENT, BEFORE ANSWERING THE DEPARTMENT'S THREE QUESTIONS, I SHALL BRIEFLY RECAPITULATE SOME GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE SOVIET-MALIAN RELATIONSHIP AS REPORTED FROM THIS EMBASSY. THE DEPARTMENT MAY WISH ALSO TO LOOK AS SUCH MESSAGES AS 76 BAMA KO 3030, BAMA KO 0154, THE MALI PARM (BAMA KO 1568), AND BAMA KO 2930.

2. MALI PERCEIVES ITSELF AS INDEPENDENT AND NON-ALIGNED, ACTING IN ITS OWN INTERESTS AND NO ONE ELSE'S. IT SEEKS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AID FROM THE WEST AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE FROM THE SOVIETS. THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT CONSIDERS AN EFFECTIVE ARMED FORCE ESSENTIAL TO ITS IMAGE AND TO MALI'S SECURITY, AND THE USSR IS THE ONLY SOURCE WILLING TO PROVIDE THE REQUIRED EQUIPMENT. MALI BELIEVES ITSELF FREE OF OUTSIDE INFLUENCE AND IS CONFIDENT OF ITS ABILITY TO HANDLE ANY UNWANTED
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PRESSURES.

3. WITH RESPECT TO AIRFIELDS, THE SOVIETS HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKING SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS OF THE RUNWAYS AT SIKASSO, SAN, MOPTI, AND GAO, OSTENSIBLY FOR MALI'S MIG-21'S BUT ACTUALLY ALSO FOR SOVIET AIRCRAFT, JUST IN CASE. MALI IS STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT TO THE

SOVIETS BECAUSE IN THE VAST BELT ABOVE THE 11TH PARALLEL, ONLY MALI WOULD OFFER LANDING FACILITIES TO THEM ON THEIR WAY SOUTH. GAO IS MUCH CLOSER TO ALGIERS THAN IS GUINEA, AND SO FOR CERTAIN AIRCRAFT IT COULD BE A BETTER STAGING AREA. THESE AIRFIELDS ARE PROBABLY NOT INTENDED AS ANYTHING MORE THAN BACK-UP OR EMERGENCY LANDING PLACES.

4. WHEREAS THE SOVIET INTENT IN IMPROVING MALI'S RUNWAYS WOULD SEEM CLEARLY TO BE TO PREPARE FOR CONTINGENCIES IN CONNECTION WITH ANY DESIGNS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, MALI'S PURPOSES ARE DIFFERENT. FOR MALI SUCH SOVIET ACTIVITY IS SEEN AS UPGRADING ITS BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE IN A WAY NO OTHER POWER IS WILLING TO DO. EQUALLY IMPORTANT, IF AN AIRLIFT WERE NEEDED TO BRING MAJORITY RULE TO SOUTHERN AFRICA, MALI COULD OFFER ITS AIRFIELDS AS REFUELING OR STAGING AREAS AS ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMON EFFORT.

5. MALI DOES NOT WANT A VIOLENT SOLUTION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA BECAUSE OF THE ATTENDANT SUFFERING AND THE DIVERSION OF ENERGIES FROM THE GOAL OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. BUT IT REMAINS SKEPTICAL OF NEGOTIATIONS, AND IF NOTHING COMES OF THEM AND ARMED STRUGGLE WERE VIEWED AS THE ONLY WAY TO "LIBERATE"

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SOUTHERN AFRICA, MALI WOULD DO ITS PART THROUGH ITS AIRFIELDS. AT THE TIME FOR SOVIET USE OF BAMA KO-SENOU FOR THE AIRLIFT TO ANGOLA IN LATE 1975, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS HALIDOU TOURE TOLD THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR THAT MALI "WOULD ALLY ITSELF WITH THE DEVIL" IF IT WOULD HELP THE SOUTHERN AFRICA CAUSE. ACTUALLY, THE MALIANS, WHO UNEQUIVOCALLY BACKED THE MPLA, WERE CONVINCED THAT THE SOVIETS AND THE CUBANS WERE "PURE" IN THEIR MOTIVATION AND HAD NO DESIGNS IN ANGOLA OF THEIR OWN. THAT CONSIDERATION WAS IMPORTANT TO THE MALIAN PERCEPTION, FOR TOURE ALSO SAID AT THE TIME (AND TO ME LATER) THAT MALI WOULD NOT WANT TO DO ANYTHING TO FURTHER AN OUTSIDE POWER'S AMBITIONS ON THE CONTINENT.

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FOR AF/W

6. TO TURN TO THE DEPARTMENT'S QUESTIONS, WE KNOW OF NO SPECIFIC AGREEMENT GIVING THE SOVIETS USE OF THE AIRFIELDS IMPROVED BY THEM, AND THE FRENCH ARE QUITE CERTAIN THERE IS NONE. THERE MAY, HOWEVER, BE VERBAL PROMISES OR EVEN AN INFORMAL LETTER. GENERAL ARRANGEMENTS CONCERNING SOVIET ASSISTANCE CONCLUDED UNDER THE MODIBO KEITA REGIME APPARENTLY STILL EXIST BUT ARE HIGHLY SECRET, AND IT IS SAID THAT VIRTUALLY NO ONE, EVEN AMONG MALIAN OFFICIALS, KNOWS WHAT IS IN THEM. IN ANY CASE, THE FORM OF ANY AGREEMENT OR LACK THEREOF WOULD NOT BE IMPORTANT IF THE SITUATION MET THE MILITARY COMMITTEE'S CRITERIA FOR ASSISTANCE TO SOUTHERN AFRICA.

7. A DEMARCHE TO EXPRESS CONCERN OVER POSSIBLE FUTURE SOVIET USE OF MALI'S AIRFIELDS TO SUPPORT OPERATIONS ELSEWHERE IN AFRICA WOULD BE, IN A WORD, UNACCEPTABLE TO THE MALIANS. THE DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL THE FOREIGN MINISTRY'S REACTION OF CONTROLLED ANGER WHEN CHARGE DAWKINS DELIVERED A DIPLOMATIC NOTE EXPRESSING THE USG'S CONCERN OVER THE ANGOLA AIRLIFT ON DECEMBER 24, 1975 (75 BAMA KO 4730). IT WILL ALSO REMEMBER AMBASSADOR MCGUIRE'S MESSAGE SOME TWO MONTHS LATER REPORTING THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF MALI
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CAME CLOSE TO REFUSING TO RECEIVE THE DECEMBER DEMARCHE AND THAT OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS HAD SUFFERED FROM IT (76 BAMA KO 0591). A SIMILAR DEMARCHE NOW WOULD HAVE NO CHANCE OF SUCCESS.

8. THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR CONSIDERS THAT AN APPROACH

TO MALI BY FRANCE, STILL THE SINGLE MOST INFLUENTIAL POWER HERE, WOULD BE AS BADLY RECEIVED AS ONE BY US AND WOULD PERHAPS BE EVEN LESS ACCEPTABLE.

9. THE WEST AFRICAN DEFENSE ARRANGEMENT UNDER THE CEAO FRAMEWORK OFFERS THE POSSIBILITY OF IMPORTANT MODERATING INFLUENCES ON MALI, AND WE ARE PLEASED THAT MALI HAS BEEN FOLDED IN. THE AFRICANS, HOWEVER, ARE THEMSELVES ENOUGH CONCERNED ABOUT SOVIET ACTIVITY IN AFRICA TO UNDERTAKE THE REQUISITE STEPS WITH MALI WITHOUT WESTERN PRODDING. I WOULD THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT WE LET THE AFRICANS PURSUE THEIR OWN COURSES WITH MALI IN THEIR OWN EFFECTIVE WAY.

10. FUNDAMENTALLY, MALI'S REACTION TO ANY FUTURE SOVIET REQUEST TO USE ITS AIRFIELDS AND AIR SPACE FOR OPERATIONS ELSEWHERE IN AFRICA WILL DEPEND ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES PREVAILING AT THE TIME AND ON HOW THE REQUEST IS PRESENTED. IF IT IS CLEVERLY COINED IN TERMS OF "LIBERATING" SOUTHERN AFRICA, MALI WOULD RESPOND AFFIRMATIVELY. IF THE SITUATION WERE NOT CLEAR, HOWEVER, AND MALI PERCEIVED AN ELEMENT OF SOVIET SELF-SERVING OR POWER POLITICS, ITS REPLY MIGHT NOT BE SO EASILY PREDICTED. THE WESTERN EFFORT AT NEGOTIATED SOLUTIONS IS CRITICAL, BOTH IN THE HOPE OF ACHIEVING THOSE SOLUTIONS AND TO DENY THE SOVIETS ANY JUSTIFICATION FOR INTERVENTION ON

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THE GROUND THAT ONLY THEY CAN HELP.
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Message Attributes

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